

A Veterans Oral History
Heritage Education Commission
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Anthony Walter
Narrator

James Specht
Interviewer

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Anthony Walter Biography

Anthony Walter was born in Bismarck, ND and graduate from Bismarck High School and North Dakota State University. He saw combat in the Pacific Theatre serving as a corpsman. He took part in the invasion of Okinawa.

AW: My name is Anthony Walter. I live at Bismarck, North Dakota. I was born and raised in Bismarck and after I went in the service I went back there. [unclear] I managed two pharmacies; one pharmacy in the shopping center and another one in a clinic. I enlisted June 23, 1942. I was stationed at the U. S. Naval Hospital, USN Training Station in Great Lakes, Illinois. I was a Corpsman Second Class. I transferred to the U. S. Naval Hospital in Norfolk, Virginia, as a corpsman and completed a lab technician course. I transferred to Marine Corps Camp, Camp Lejeune, New River, North Carolina; transferred to the 45th Replacement Battalion, Fleet Marine Force in New River, North Carolina; transferred to the Replacement Battalion TCFMF Pacific, stationed in Oahu, Hawaii. We were actually in the city of Honolulu. Transferred to the 16th Anti-aircraft Battalion, with stops at Tinian, Saipan and the invasion of Okinawa and I made First Class Pharmacy Mate at Norfolk and Chief Pharmacy Mate in Hawaii.

JS: Did you have an occupation when you went into the military?

AW: Yes, I was a pharmacist.

JS: So how old were you when you went in?

AW: I was 34.

JS: 29, I think.

AW: 29.

JS: Did you enlist or were you drafted?

AW: I enlisted. I knew my number was coming up so I enlisted. The reason I went and enlisted in the Navy because a [unclear] bought the Pharmacy and he suggested I go in the Army. He said, "You're eligible for OCS and you can come out a lieutenant."

And I said, "No, Pat. I'm not interested in that." I said, "I don't want to carry a gun." I said, "I want nice, clean sheets to sleep on and have three meals a day." They never told me about the Marines. When we were like in Okinawa, we slept in pup tents and we ate whatever we could.

JS: So you were trained as a Marine after you got into the Navy?

AW: Yes, that was at Camp Lejeune, North Carolina. We took our basic training there.

JS: What was your job when you were in the service, primarily?

AW: As a corpsman, taking care of illnesses and things like that. Kids would get hurt and stuff like that. There was one thing I got out a kick out of the Marines. When everybody was going on patrol, they always said, "Is the Doc going?" "Yeah." They'd go any place as long as the corpsman was with them. And if we were on liberty, nobody dared touch us because if a guy got trouble in the Marines, right away we would come to his aid, so I admired them for that. When we were in Okinawa, of course, we couldn't wear our red cross on our cap or on our arms because the Japanese picked those out. They'd shoot them first. So we never wore any identification.

JS: Do you have a particular memory of an event during your military service that you'd like to share?

AW: Not especially. I had some problems that I'll tell you about later but not now because I don't know whether you want to hear them or not.

There was one thing that kind of tickled me one time. We were around Tinian. We had to take our booster shots and they asked me how long it would take to get them. And I said, "Oh." I said, "Probably about three hours, three and a half hours. Well, the doctor told us five hours. I said, "Well." I said, "Let me do it my way." I said, "I think we can do it in three." The first time we ran through in three hours; next time ran through in two hours and forty-five minutes. That's one of the things that pleases me; that I was able to do that. Right now, I wouldn't even think about doing that. But then it pleased me to be able do something like that, so.

JS: Do you feel your years in the military were a benefit to you?

AW: It gave me more of a perspective of what it's like to be in the service, and more so than what I would've had. But other than that, there was nothing in particular.

JS: Did you use any of the G.I. benefits as far as a home loan, you already had your education?

AW: No. I had my education. I thought about going into medicine. But I thought, what the heck; you got a degree in pharmacy. That's good enough for me, so I didn't do it.

JS: Did it give you a different outlook on people? Because by some of your photos, you saw some action in the service.

AW: Well, the foreign people are different. They were different and it seemed we didn't have too much contact with them. But they seemed to be different in their

observations and the things they would do, compared to what we would do or the way we'd do it.

JS: Were you in any dangerous situations and did you feel the military provided adequate equipment?

AW: I think the most dangerous period we had, well we had others too, but this one was the first one I got into. We were on LSTs when we went into Okinawa we were in this Anti-aircraft Artillery Battalion and they wanted us to give the Marines some military support when they go into Okinawa. But they went across us so darned fast they must have sat out there on the ships on these LSTs while the Japanese were shooting planes out there and the planes were coming, strafing us, and we were down below, and we could just hear the bullets bouncing off the deck and we said, "It's a wonder they didn't go through." We were out there three days and then they let us go ashore and we felt a lot better about that.

Another conversation was one of the mess cooks come over visiting with me. This was in Okinawa. We got a red alert so he said, "Chief, where's your hole?" I said, "Follow me, Nick." And my hole was only big enough for me and we got in there and every time one of those bombs dropped, "Jesus Christ, Tony, get in there, get in a little further." How both of us got into that hole; he was almost twice as big as I was.

Another one that was kind of interesting was when we first went into Okinawa. We were sitting in our pup tents. I shared a pup tent with one of the other corpsman. And every night we'd get this red alert, we'd have to go to our hole. Every night we'd sleep in these pup tents. When he left the ship, he took one of those food trays with him and he used to put that under his pillow at night. This one night we got this red alert, and I said, "C'mon crew, you guys better go into your hole." "Oh," he said, "I'm too tired; I don't want to." I forced him to go. When we come back, had a little hole in the pup tent, and there was where the shrapnel fell and went all the way through that tray. If I hadn't forced him to go, he would've been dead.

I'll tell you about the other things that I remember about any close calls I had. One time I was watching airplanes having a fight and I was standing under this tree and, all of a sudden, the leaves started falling off the tree, so I got the heck out of there in a hurry.

And another funny thing that happened to us one time; we got tired of getting up every night and so there was a gun in place but it wasn't being used and was right there, so we took planks and put across there and we put three layers of sandbags on top of it. Then we'd go in there and sleep all night. We didn't have to go to our hole. And one night I was watching a dog fight and I saw these bugs flying out of there. And I thought what the heck are they? I looked in there and there was about a million termites in there, and they were eating that wood. If we had been there another day, I think they would've all caved in. So we had to take all the sandbags off and took the planks off, and they had Japanese rails there so we put the rails across, put the sandbags on top of them, and we used it again. I don't know if they're interested in this stuff or not.

JS: Absolutely! They're stories of your military experience. -- Let's go back to Okinawa and tell me what conditions you lived in on the island.

AW: **We lived, when we first went in, right in the pup tents, and we were there for I don't know how long it was, before we got into tents, but it was quite a while because we had to wait until the place was secured before we were going to go into our tents, so I don't know what else to tell you about that.**

JS: You talked about having to have screen on the bottom of your tent. What was that to keep out?

AW: **To keep the bugs out because we used to use DDT for the mosquitoes and we were worried about malaria. So we had to try to keep the screen like that. -- I can't think of anything else.**

JS: There was another story that you were going to lead into.

AW: **Not on tape, though.**

JS: Okay.

AW: **I was in Okinawa. I was in the service overseas for two years so I was eligible to come back for rest and R&R. I had my orders to go [unclear] after we got a new doctor in, and I think the doctor was just out of school, and he declared me essential personnel and I couldn't go. So when they dropped that atomic bomb on Hiroshima, why that cleared everything up so that we got to go back and then we didn't have to go into Japan and everything. We didn't go into Asia and Japan at all.**

JS: Did you feel that was the right move to end the war?

AW: **I think so. I think it was because they didn't want any more people to get killed over there. I think one blast and I think that was it. And I think that saved a lot of lives, too. Of course, that's just my opinion. Because if we'd have gone into Asia, it would've cost a lot more and taken a lot more lives.**